



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE PLIGHT OF THE RICH MAN IN A DEMOCRACY

ANNIE MARION MACLEAN
Chicago, Illinois

Centuries ago it was written that a camel could pass through the eye of a needle with greater ease than a rich man could enter the kingdom of heaven. A misinterpretation of the idea contained in this statement has developed through the ages into what appears to be a popular belief that the rich man is destined to eternal perdition. As a result of this seemingly popular belief it has become a much-lauded pastime to torment the rich man through his life with a recital of his alleged vices, in order that he may be prepared, in a measure at least, for the damnation which will be his eventually.

This attitude is psychologically interesting, and it may be profitable, or at least entertaining, to discuss for a little the causes and possible effect of such a widespread feeling of antagonism toward any one man, taken as typifying a class.

That the feeling is widespread cannot be denied by those who are in touch with the times. Prejudice against the millionaire is evident on all sides, except perhaps in social circles, where he is sought by those who would climb by his aid. Does he aspire to serve his country, his state, or his city, there are those who quickly intimate that his place, like woman's, is at home, or at least remote from the councils of men. Does he essay to be a teacher of morals or religion, scoffers are at hand to question his motives. Thus does the rich man find himself handicapped by prejudice, if not by actual ill-feeling. Some accept the limitations placed upon them by their fellows, and with a shrug plunge into the pleasures that money can buy, and thus bring added odium upon themselves.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is a maxim evidently ill-adapted to present-day conditions, and can easily be relegated

to the mistiness of the past; while in its place may be substituted an injunction to curse thy neighbor, especially if he have riches.

Probably the dominant ambition of every wide-awake man in the United States today is to control money. The amount desired in each case may vary, the difference being one of degree only. The little boy runs a paper route, or sells lemonade, in order that he may have money of his own, and his curly head is often patted by his elders in a most approving manner. Particularly is this true of the little velvet-frocked cherub who hawks a weekly paper perhaps, up and down his own more or less exclusive block. He has early caught the spirit of the land of his birth, and is deserving of commendation.

The boy fresh from high school is filled with the ambition of his little brother, and looks at once for a job which will bring him in money; while the young man in college seems to be given over largely to acquiring knowledge, or the hallmark of knowledge, for the sole purpose of turning it to financial uses; for with the democratization of learning has come its commercialization. The young student everywhere is fitting himself for a business or profession that will give him the opportunity for commercial gain, while those occupations which yield the smallest financial return are eschewed by the more alert scholars. Evidence of this is to be found in the lamentations of some religious people over the dearth of young men entering the ministry, and in the terror in certain quarters that the public schools are jeopardized by their imminent feminization. The opportunity for usefulness in the work of teacher or preacher, which was formerly a reason of much importance in choosing a career, appears now to be a justly negligible factor when weighed against chances to make money.

A young man's success is judged largely by the standard of dollars and cents. Idealism thus slips out of his life, while he plunges with others into the wild scramble for gold. As a man grows older he is deemed successful in proportion to his ability to control material things, and this popular estimate of success has given us an aristocracy based on wealth; an upper class dominant mainly by the legerdemain of chance, and constantly undergoing

change through the same sleight of hand, for not all of those who trail success will find her.

Now admitting for the sake of argument that the foregoing presentation of the situation is a true one, it becomes germane to seek the basis of the apparent antagonism against wealth. For some time past the most popular writing has taken the form of vituperative protest against existing conditions, particularly the hard conditions that result from the modern system of industry. In the effort to get at the root of these difficulties the employer has been singled out and marked, to indicate that he is the guilty person. Since the employer is usually better off than the people complaining, his greater wealth becomes added contumely, until eventually the rich man has come to be held responsible for most social maladjustments, and consequently a fit butt for social chastisement—in short, a man to be scorned; that is, the very man who has succeeded in getting what practically all the other men are endeavoring to acquire has become at the same time a thing to be despised. This is a unique situation.

Is the goal of ambition, after all, only a seething cauldron of popular hatred? Is the possession of the thing in life apparently most to be desired to brand one as more iniquitous than his fellows? Does reaching the goal really only mean that the swiftest runner is to be a target for the arrows of the following multitude? If this be the case, he must be regarded as the victim of a practical joke played by society. But society is playing the same joke on all the individuals in the race; that is, society is playing the joke on itself, which argues a state of social dementia not readily conceded by any of us. It would seem, therefore, that we must look for some other and more reasonable cause.

In the group of persons striving for wealth are usually found four classes: (1) those who are not successful, but who take things philosophically and really get considerable satisfaction out of life; (2) those who succeed in amassing fortunes; (3) those who are only partially successful and readily become envious; (4) those who are wholly unsuccessful and are thus forced to the kind of hand-to-mouth existence which accompanies a wage system having no

settled minimum, an existence which quickly breeds discontent, envy, and even malice toward those who are more fortunate.

Manifestly it is in the third and fourth classes that the strong feeling against the rich man is generated, and the volume that this feeling has assumed goes to show that these classes are numerically very strong. They have a grievance against society, and they proceed to vent their wrath on him who is successful. They accuse him of injuring them, as the child whose finger is bruised in the door kicks the door, as the cause of his trouble. He, being a child, could not be expected to know that the door was moved by some outside force; perhaps a naughty brother, perhaps an unobservant parent, perhaps an unhindered breeze from heaven.

The rich man who, out of the power conferred upon him by his riches, has inaugurated an industrial system inimical to the best interests of the many, rightly deserves the animadversions cast upon him. But the fair-minded person must admit that the man of great wealth is as often a result as a primal cause of industrial iniquities. He is frequently an object to be pitied rather than to be blamed. The fortune is his apparently, and what is he to do about it? That it is impossible to give it away satisfactorily is evidenced by pitiable attempts in this direction.

That there are many critics of present-day conditions ready with more or less practical suggestions is true; but it is not yet possible for them to govern the situation, so the rich man is borne on his way, until he finds himself in the maelstrom of popular envy and indignation, at once a personage to be praised and a creature to be censured—praised, because of possible favors he may bestow, and censured, why? Because he succeeded in getting what all the others tried to get, and failed? At all events, he presents this dual personality, with the result that being conscious of society's estimate of him he becomes more or less what people insist that he is. He becomes arrogant, embittered, revolutionary even, and his control of wealth makes him a tyrant in spite of himself. He is often forced to strike in self-protection, and his acts are misinterpreted. Then the rich man gets threatening letters, and knows no peace at any time. And what is it all about? Always the answer that he got what the others wanted keeps sug-

gesting itself. There follows a time when he is held guilty, without the lawful judgment of his peers. The arrogant reformer sees no good in him, and goes about blackening a reputation he has already adjudged black, until some frenzied fool fancies he has a divinely appointed mission to shoot him.

That rich men sometimes squander their money in an offensive way is true; so also do poor men. The purchase of costly jewels may be no more reprehensible than the purchase of glass beads; assuming that in both cases the articles are regarded as luxuries. So far as serious expenditures are concerned, the rich may be on quite as high a plane ethically as the poor. The possession of glass beads is fully as immoral as the possession of diamond necklaces when neither are honestly earned.

Rich men may, and of course do, violate the principles of the Golden Rule, as in fact does every other member of society. The rich men may be responsible for certain industrial hardships, they may at times be unjust to their employees; but so are those of smaller means; which is only another way of saying that human nature is much the same, wherever it is found.

Probably the best example of industrial tyranny and unethical treatment of employees that modern society has to show is to be found in the case of domestic servants, particularly in the houses of middle-class housewives who keep but one general drudge. The possession of wealth does not necessarily predispose one to brutality in his relations with his fellow-men.

In view of the foregoing, it does not seem quite fair to single out one man who is very much like the rest of us, except perhaps in his acquisitive ability, and hurl at him deadly invective just because he happens to be conspicuous. Let us seek the cause of social and industrial wrongdoing; let us strive without ceasing to eradicate the evil; but let us first remove the mote from our own eyes, in order that we may see more clearly the location of the beam.

Just so long as society encourages the perpetuation of a system which makes possible the amassing of vast fortunes by individuals, so long must it, to be consistent, applaud the man who has acquired the fortune. The winner of any prize, to be sure, makes some enemies by his prowess. He wins what the other contestants

strove to win. It is not fair of course to give people an opportunity to compete and then to adjudge the successful ones enemies of the social order. If, however, we feel that the possession of great wealth is inimical to the republic, and to democracy, then let us make it impossible for men to acquire fortunes, and let us reconstruct our notions of success, so that the possession of much money will no longer be regarded as the supreme aim for the ambitious.

It is true that a class—growing constantly in importance—is registering its disapproval of the present system, and working hard to bring about a change in social and industrial conditions. These people are drawn from the poor, the middle class, and the wealthy, and they are making themselves felt in political life. Their criticism of present conditions is not by any means all destructive. They bid us return at once to a higher and simpler plane of living, where the almighty dollar will not be so abjectly worshiped, and where better human relationships will be the prime consideration. This is well, but while indorsing the plan, let us first, last, and always, in the name of consistency and honesty, leave the poor rich man alone.

Blatant agitators may defeat their own ends by too bitter vilifying of Croesus; and the man whom they hold up to public scorn is likely at any time to be rated a martyr. In the event of a revulsion of popular feeling he may eventually loom on the horizon as a hero.